
United States Constitution



Our Constitution

- 220 years old
- Framework for government
- Oldest and shortest written National Constitution
- Preamble, 7 Articles (sections)
- Living Document
 - An outline of government
 - Outlines how current government can create, enforce, and evaluate legislation
 - Does not create legislation
 - Can be changed to meet changing times
 - Amended 27 times

Preamble

- Introduction
- “We the People...”
 - Establishes Popular Sovereignty
 - Written by Gouverneur Morris
- Lists purposes of document
 - Form a more perfect union
 - Establish justice
 - Ensure domestic tranquility
 - Provide for common defense
 - Promote the general welfare
 - Ensure the blessings of liberty

Article I

- Legislative Branch
 - Divides into 2 houses
 - House of Representatives and Senate
 - Qualifications for Reps, Senators
 - Lists powers of congress
 - Responsibilities of each house
 - Outlines legislative procedure
 - How laws are made
 - Sets some guidelines for Congress



Article II



- Executive Branch
 - Creates office of the President, Vice President
 - Qualifications, terms, and removal.
 - Describes procedures for electing the President
 - Lists powers and duties of the President

Article III



- Judicial Branch
 - Establishes a Court system
 - A Supreme Court
 - Outlines its jurisdiction –what cases it can hear
 - Charges Congress with establishing lower federal courts

Article IV

- Federalism
 - Describes the relationship between states and with the Central Government
 - Guarantees a republican form of government in all states
 - Allows Congress to admit new states



Article V

- Amending the Constitution
 - Hard to change, but not *too* hard
 - 2/3 of both houses of Congress
 - Ratified by 3/4 of the states
 - Out of 11,000 amendments proposed to Congress, only 33 have been sent to the States for ratification
 - 27 amendments to date

Article VI

- Constitutional Supremacy
 - Establishes the Constitution as the “Supreme Law of the land”
 - National laws always trump state laws
 - Gives the Central Government power over the states
 - Unlike the Articles of Confederation

Article VII

- Ratification
 - Requires 9 states to ratify in order for the Constitution to go into effect



Key Principals in the Constitution

- Creates a Democratic Republic
 - Has elements of both styles of government
 - Republic – when people elect representatives to make decisions for them
 - Democracy - when everyone has a vote in decisions made
- Creates a **Federal** Government – power is divided and shared between state and national governments
 - Other types
 - Confederate – sovereign states delegate power to a national government for specific purposes
 - Unitary – All power is concentrated in a national government
- When we are talking about the U.S. government, the terms Federal Government, Central Government, and National Government are interchangeable
 - They all refer to our government in Washington, DC that makes laws and decisions for the entire country.

Separation of Powers

■ Separation of Powers

- At the national level—dividing up the powers and responsibilities in government so there is no one group (or person) who makes all the decisions
 - Legislative Branch – makes laws
 - Executive Branch – enforces laws
 - Judicial Branch – interprets laws
- Federalism—divides the powers between the national and state governments
 - Reserved to the states
 - Delegated to the national government
 - Concurrent (shared) by the states and the national government

Checks and Balances

- **Checks and Balances** – ways in which one branch of government limits the powers of another branch, keeping any one branch from becoming too powerful
 - "Ambition should be matched with ambition"
– James Madison